



Creating Healthy School Climates To Prevent Adolescent Dating Abuse

A Publication of the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence



Acknowledgments

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We are thankful to the thoughtful contributions and expertise of:

Jeannine Barbato – California
Department of Public Health

Enrica Bertoldo - California
Department of Public Health

Lisa Sohn – Futures Without Violence

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Lisa Eisenberg – California School-
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Alison Chopel – California Adolescent
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Melodie Kruspodin – Peace Over Violence

Aracely Lozano – Peace Over Violence

Caroline Fruth – Alliance for
Community Transformations

Audrey Davis – Alliance for
Community Transformations

Introduction

Ensuring that all students can learn within a safe and healthy school community is the key to successful student engagement that ultimately leads to current and future success. Many educators and schools are recognizing the importance of this context, which is also referred to as the school climate. The promotion of students' healthy relationship behaviors, including the prevention of adolescent dating abuse, should be considered as an important, and often vital, component of a school's overall school climate.

By providing school communities with resources, support and policies that promote healthy relationship development on campus, school leaders can create positive and healthy school climates that help guide student development, promote student health and risk prevention, contribute to student learning and

success, and increase the likelihood that students will graduate. Healthy school climate also creates sustainable school environments that keep students actively and socially engaged, respected, and free from violence.

This brief is intended to help school districts and education stakeholders identify strategies that schools and school districts can take to support a healthy school climate that addresses and prevents adolescent dating abuse. While the needs of every district and school will vary, our purpose is to provide recommendations and responsibilities that create an environment where students, families, educators, administrators, and community advocates work together to develop, live and contribute to a shared school vision and climate improvement plan. By involving the whole school community, districts and stakeholders can identify ways to include

adolescent dating abuse prevention as an integral component of their comprehensive school climate plan.

The content of this brief is broken into six sections which can help schools and communities understand and integrate adolescent dating abuse prevention into the overall framework of healthier school climates.

- Adolescent Dating Abuse Overview
- School Climate Overview
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Overview of relevant laws and existing school structures
- Recommendations for Incorporating Adolescent Dating Abuse Prevention into School Climate Efforts
- Parent, Caregiver, and Community Engagement

Adolescent Dating Abuse Overview

Adolescent dating abuse is defined as verbal, physical, emotional, sexual or technological conduct by a person to harm, threaten, intimidate or control a dating partner, regardless of whether that relationship is continuing or has concluded.¹

Overview

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- **VERBAL:** threats to the partner or his/her family, putdowns, yelling or name-calling
- **PHYSICAL:** hitting, hair-pulling, slapping, punching, pinching or shoving
- **EMOTIONAL:** telling the partner how to dress, expressing a high degree of jealousy, stalking, calling or texting frequently to keep track of a partner
- **SEXUAL:** forcing the partner to have unwanted sex, touching or kissing when the partner does not want to, not allowing the partner to use birth control
- **TECHNOLOGICAL:** unwanted, repeated calls or text messages, non-consensual access to email, social networking accounts, texts or cell phone call logs, pressuring for or disseminating private or embarrassing pictures, videos or other personal information

Adolescent dating abuse can have a serious impact on schools and students. Incidents of adolescent dating abuse impact the safety of students and staff, distract students from learning and compromise the school climate. Nearly half of students who experience dating violence have reported that some of the abuse took place on school grounds.² Even students that are not victims of abuse are affected, as witnessing dating abuse has been associated with decreased school attendance and academic performance.³ The connection to academics is dramatic with 20% of students with mostly D and F grades having engaged in dating violence in the last year, while only 6% of students with mostly A's have engaged in dating violence.⁴

Addressing and preventing adolescent dating abuse within the context of school climate can help youth develop the skills necessary to recognize, establish, and maintain healthy future relationships and pro-social behaviors. Integrating adolescent dating abuse prevention into school climate discussions and policies is necessary to form lasting and positive impacts on the future outcomes and relationships of youth.

School Climate Overview

In the context of this guide, school climate refers to the

quality and character of school life. It is based on patterns of school life experiences and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures. A healthy climate includes social norms, values and expectations that support and keep school communities socially, emotionally and physically safe. Healthy school climates also promote a culture of engagement and respect. Students, families, educators, school administrators, and community advocates work together to develop and contribute to a shared school vision. Each stakeholder models positive behaviors that contribute to the maintenance of a shared, healthy school climate.⁵ While the terms, "school climate," "school environment," "learning culture," and "learning environment" have often been used interchangeably, for the purposes of this guide, we will refer to "school climate" as defined above.

While schools and the state of California have recognized the need to address and prevent instances of sexual harassment and bullying as a part of creating healthier school environments,⁶ there is not as much attention given to abusive behavior that may exist within dating relationships.⁷ This is a missed opportunity, since research shows that when students are healthy in mind and body, they are more engaged, miss less school, focus better in class, and are more likely to graduate. Students look forward to attending school when they feel that a community of caring adults and peers support their success.⁸

As student engagement is a key component of a healthy school climate, the California State Parent Teacher Association (PTA) provides some measures of student engagement, including:⁹

- School attendance rates
- The number of students who are chronically absent (when students are absent for more than 10 percent of school year for any reason)
- Middle-school dropout and graduation rates
- High school dropout and graduation rates
- The number and types of student leadership groups, on-campus clubs and extra-curricular activities available

Adolescent Dating Abuse Overview and School Climate Overview

- The number of students participating in student leadership groups, on-campus clubs and extracurricular activities available
- The number of classes taught that provide students with multiple ways of learning
- The information schools collect using these measures can be valuable tools in an ongoing process of assessing and monitoring school climate improvement efforts.
- In addition to the recommended content of this policy brief, the National School Climate Council has developed the National School Climate Standards,¹⁰ which create a framework that can be utilized to maintain positive school climates. The standards include:
- The school community has a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing and sustaining a positive school climate
- The school community sets policies specifically promoting (a) the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions and engagement, and (b) a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged

“Students in grades 7-12 must be taught content and skills related to recognizing, building, and maintaining healthy relationships that are based on mutual affection and are free from violence, coercion and intimidation.”

- The school community's practices are identified, prioritized and supported to (a) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students, (b) enhance engagement in teaching, learning and school-wide activities; (c) address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged; and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting this standard

- The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically
- The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice

School leaders and stakeholders can use the information contained within this policy brief, alongside the National School Climate Standards, to help guide, shape, and maintain healthy school climates that focus on addressing adolescent dating abuse prevention.

Overview of relevant laws and existing school structures

Recently enacted California legislation provides a strong rationale for schools to address the prevention of adolescent dating abuse through its inclusion into overall school climate policy.

California Healthy Youth Act¹¹

The California Healthy Youth Act (CHYA) of 2015 has a strong emphasis on healthy relationships, in both the purpose and the required content of the law. Students in grades 7-12 must be taught content and skills related to recognizing, building, and maintaining healthy relationships that are based on mutual affection and are free from violence, coercion and intimidation. CHYA also requires instruction about unhealthy behaviors and risks to their health, such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and sex trafficking.¹²

Local Control Accountability Plan¹³

In 2013, California passed the Fair School Funding Law, more commonly known as the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). LCFF provides for an increased level of local spending flexibility to determine which programs and/or services have the greatest likelihood to ensure that each student will succeed in relation to eight state priority areas. Through a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), a school district must develop a vision

School Climate Overview and Overview of relevant laws and existing school structures

for their students, annual goals and specific actions necessary to meet eight state priority areas.

Safe Place to Learn Act¹⁴

The Safe Place to Learn Act is codified in Article 5.5 of the California Education Code. Article 5.5 makes it the policy of the State of California to ensure that all local educational agencies continue to work to reduce discrimination, harassment, violence, intimidation, and bullying. Article 5.5 also makes it State policy to improve pupil safety at schools and to foster the connections between pupils and supportive adults, schools, and communities.

Parent Advisory Committees¹⁵

Parents play a critical role in a school's climate and many choose to get involved through committees such as a school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Parent Teacher Council (PTC), Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), or the English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC). These parent committees guide and communicate to school administration on specific issues, concerns and needs of students.

School Site Councils¹⁶

The school site council is a group of teachers, parents, classified employees, and students (at the high school level) that works with the principal to develop, review and evaluate school improvement programs and school budgets. Site councils generally either make decisions or advise the principal on the school budget and the academic or school improvement plan. In addition to academic planning, many site councils are also responsible for making decisions about parent engagement, safety and discipline.

Recommendations for Incorporating Adolescent Dating Abuse Prevention into School Climate Efforts

Adding Adolescent Dating Abuse Policy into Existing Policies

Local school districts must comply with the minimum standards set by the California Education Code; however we encourage districts to develop stronger

district-wide policies that support and strengthen California Law. While in many districts, developing a specific adolescent dating abuse prevention policy will be the best course of action; districts can also consider how to incorporate these issues into the existing policies and structures previously mentioned.

One starting place to introducing adolescent dating abuse prevention into the overall context of creating a healthier school climate is by reviewing the school and/or school district's current policies that are related to student health and safety, such as anti-bullying policies, and incorporating adolescent dating abuse where it is relevant. Schools can add provisions that explicitly include adolescent dating abuse and recognize the intimate relationship between dating partners and the added complexity that these relationships bring. Further examples of specific policy provisions can be found in, "Addressing Bullying and Adolescent Dating Abuse: Supporting Healthy Relationships in Schools."¹⁷

The school district's LCAP review and approval process, which must be finalized on or before August 15th of every year, serves as an opportunity to discuss adolescent dating abuse prevention. School districts should use this process to educate the community on how adolescent dating abuse prevention efforts play a significant role in many state priority areas. "Student Engagement" is one of the eight priority areas within the LCAP that strongly aligns with adolescent dating abuse prevention efforts and school climate. For the purposes of LCAP, "student engagement" means providing students with programs, course work and opportunities – both in and out of the classroom - that motivate them and keep them in school. Researching your own district's current trends for the various measurements of school engagement and sharing them during LCAP development will help identify goals that can be pursued and achieved. These types of school-specific data can be collected through:

1. School and district specific student surveys
2. CALIFORNIA BEHAVIORAL RISK FACTOR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM (BRFSS) - an on-going telephone survey of randomly selected adults, which collects information on a wide variety of health-related behaviors. BRFSS is conducted by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), in collaboration with the Centers for

School Climate Overview

Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

3. **YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM (YRBSS)** - monitors six types of health-risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death and disability among youth and adults. YRBSS includes a national school-based survey conducted by the CDC and state, territorial, tribal, and local surveys conducted by state, territorial, and local education and health agencies and tribal governments.
4. **THE CALIFORNIA SCHOOL CLIMATE, HEALTH, AND LEARNING SURVEY (CAL-SCHLS)** - comprises three interrelated surveys developed for and supported by the California Department of Education:
 - a. **CALIFORNIA HEALTHY KIDS SURVEY** – the largest statewide survey of resiliency, protective factors, risk behaviors, and school climate in the nation.
 - b. **CALIFORNIA SCHOOL STAFF SURVEY** – serves as a means to confidentially obtain staff perceptions about learning and teaching conditions in order to regularly inform decisions about professional development, instruction, the implementation of learning supports, and school reform.
 - c. **CALIFORNIA SCHOOL PARENT SURVEY** - designed to provide teachers, administrators, and other school staff with information directly from parents that can be used to foster positive learning and teaching environments, parent involvement, and student achievement, health, and well-being.

As part of the LCAP process, districts should also ensure dedicated funding for adolescent dating abuse prevention efforts is identified, including specifying specific staff, programs and services that are often difficult to fund otherwise. This can include:

- Hiring a youth program coordinator, or contracting with a local organization with expertise in adolescent dating abuse prevention, to provide programs or services on campus.
- Hiring a community school coordinator to connect students experiencing adolescent dating abuse to community resources and services.
- Hiring an onsite violence prevention coordinator to support and train teachers on identifying

and responding to school bullying and adolescent dating abuse. In addition, this person would work with victims and perpetrators of bullying or adolescent dating abuse.

Engaging Community Partners

School districts should also incorporate local service providers into school climate improvement and violence response plans. This should include sexual and domestic violence response centers, mental health providers, and other healthcare resources. To increase the support of community partners, schools should develop opportunities for community involvement in school programs or by holding community events. These events can range from schools hosting community health and support fairs or bringing in speakers and expert presenters from community organizations. By having community partners engage in the school climate improvement process, schools can ensure that students have access to safe, nurturing spaces when school is not in session.



“Students need to be able to take a leadership role in creating a positive school climate and should be supported by the schools in doing so.”

Roles and Responsibilities

Healthy school climates that support the development of healthy relationships and prevent adolescent dating

Recommendations for Incorporating Adolescent Dating Abuse Prevention into School Climate Efforts

abuse are created and sustained by actively engaging everyone invested in positive school outcomes. As positive school climates and adolescent dating abuse prevention go hand-in-hand, it is imperative for schools to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities on campus to create a positive school climate that supports students' academic success, health, and well-being.

Students:

Students need to be able to take a leadership role in creating a positive school climate and should be supported by the schools in doing so. Students can contribute their voices and ideas about improving school climate in many ways, including:

- Participating in the school climate improvement team or providing input through student government, the school board or other leadership groups.
- Helping to engage their peers in school climate improvement.
- Being involved in all parts of the school climate improvement process including planning and evaluation.
- Helping to strengthen the school climate improvement process, by examining what is working well and what needs additional work.

Parents:

Parents can engage in school climate improvement in the following ways:

- Providing feedback to school administrators about ways to improve positive school climate efforts, and ways to engage all parents in that process.
- Participating on school leadership teams such as advisory groups or parent-teacher groups.
- Encouraging families in the school community to communicate the value of positive school climate, and to use their voices to be advocates for their children.
- Helping to create or lead family engagement projects that are linked with positive school climate efforts.

School Districts:

District leaders can support the goal of improving school climate and students social and emotional well-being in the following ways:

- Providing education and information to the School Board about improving positive school climate and how it is linked to student academic success.
- Supporting the coordination and implementation of school-based and district-based climate improvement efforts.
- Promoting the inclusion of social and emotional learning into existing curricula, service-learning and other school activities such as school clubs.
- Supporting school climate assessments by using valid tools that help to improve school climate practices.
- Encouraging family and community partnerships to contribute to improving the school climate.
- Providing methods for ongoing discussion with district and school staff to review progress and problem solving within school climate improvement efforts.

Principals:

- Principals can support an improved school climate in their schools by:
- Providing leadership, ensuring access to adequate resources to explicitly and systematically promote positive school climate, and providing comprehensive and coordinated learning support for all students.
- Designating a school climate coach (see below).
- Encouraging professional development for all staff related to improving school climate
- Supporting teachers in the active engagement towards school climate improvement efforts.
- Incorporating school climate and learning support topics in school wide in services.
- Encouraging the engagement of families, parents, and community agencies in maintaining a healthy school climate.
- Sustaining a safe, quality, inclusive and engaging school climate.

Conclusion

School Boards:

Board leaders can support the goal of improving school climate and students social and emotional well-being in the following ways:

- Researching and adopting policies that are aimed at improving school climate.
- Staying informed about best practices for improving school climate and what can be implemented on a school or district level.
- Communicating information to the public and education community about what the school district is doing to improve school climate.

School Staff:

Staff members at schools can contribute to an improved school climate in the following ways:

- Seeking and using feedback from students, parents, staff and administrators to enhance school climate.
- Engaging parents and families as partners.
- Modeling positive behavior in interactions with other staff, students, and families.
- Engaging school peers in an environment of shared learning and best practice strategies.
- Participating in professional development opportunities focused on promoting healthy school climates.
- Encouraging and effectively engaging students, families, and community partners to contribute to the school climate improvement process.

School Climate Coaches:

Many schools already have someone who can take this role: an assistant principal, school counselor, or teacher. The role of the school climate coach is to develop and implement a school-wide strategy to promote positive school climate and support the social, emotional, and behavioral health of all students. The school climate coach supports the school community in the following ways:

- Developing and coordinating services and activities within each school that are aimed

at promoting positive school climate.

- Ensuring that students are receiving appropriate school- and community-based services when appropriate.
- Acting as a liaison between the school site and other community based services and resources. Meeting regularly with community partners or other interested groups to discuss collaboration opportunities.
- Coordinating policy development, classroom curriculum development, training for staff, and identifying other resources that support improving school climate.
- Providing opportunities for students to be involved in the school climate improvement process.
- Reporting to the principal and other school district leaders on the progress, challenges, and impacts of the school climate improvement process.

Community Partners/Providers:

Community partners and providers can be involved in improving school climate by:

- Learning about, supporting, and participating in school climate improvement efforts
- Supporting the school's efforts to promote student engagement/leadership and service
- Providing support parent/guardian engagement projects.
- Participating as a part of the school climate improvement team.
- Promoting school climate improvement efforts among all the other community partners and volunteers.
- Partnering with schools to provide on-site presentations and resources.

Conclusion

Given the intersections that exist between adolescent dating abuse prevention and the creation of healthy

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school climates, schools need to ensure that current and future policies and institutional structures address both issues. The recommendations provided throughout the toolkit ensure that those who will be affected by any policy change have input into crafting those changes and that the policies are better understood, accepted, and followed. Healthy school climates flourish in schools that take the steps necessary to prevent adolescent dating abuse, promote student success, and cultivate community and campus engagement.

Supplement – Parent, Caregiver, and Community Engagement

Parents play a key role in ensuring that healthy school climates are put in place to support healthy relationship skill-building for students and school staff. At every level of education, parents can be influential in bridging school and home for their children and their peers, and advocating for the school culture, programs and training that will give their kids the best foundation for academic success, and emotional and physical well-being.

An overarching supportive, safe and inclusive school culture requires a collective and collaborative effort from the entire school community: teachers, administrators, staff, parents and students. School-based programs that focus on social emotional learning and respect for differences, as well as school policies that prioritize, monitor and report on progress for all students, with a focus on eliminating disparities, are all essential pieces of the school culture puzzle.

Here are some questions to consider when evaluating the school culture of your child's school:¹⁸

1. A VISION FOR SCHOOL CULTURE: How does your child's school or district envision school culture? What are the expectations for success and what are the measureable actions being taken to achieve that?
 - The school community has a shared vision and commitment to physical and emotional safety.
 - Everyone, from the Principal to the bus driver to students, should see a role for themselves in creating a positive school culture.
 - Everyone is engaged and respected.
 - Students feel the adults in the
- school care about them.
 - Everyone models and nurtures positive and respectful relationships.
2. COMMITMENT TO STAFF SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT: How is leadership taking care of staff so that they can take care of themselves and their students? What are the school staff's values and expectations? Is it a model based on empathy, respect and generosity, and creating opportunities for staff bonding?
 - Policies are in place that promote the development of skills, knowledge and engagement.
 - Colleagues should applaud each other's successes.
 - Staff should model with each other the behaviors and attitudes they wish to see in students.
 - Administration should emphasize, and make time for, everyone's personal self-care. Put policies in place to support staff efforts at self-care.
 - When a child has an emotional or behavioral breakthrough, celebrate! Don't forget to acknowledge your own accomplishments, too.
 - Create a community of colleagues, fellow parents, or other caregivers around you to vent or share successes, lessons learned, and tough days.
3. RELEVANT CLASSROOM PRACTICES AND CURRICULA: How does your child's school develop pro-social behaviors in students and the adults within the school? Are a variety of age-appropriate classroom curricula that contain content on pro-social behavior made available to teachers and are those lessons embedded in coursework?
 - Positive behavior should be recognized and encouraged.
 - Ensure good classroom resources are available and shared.
 - Put practices in place that address barriers to learning.
4. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Are parents included in the school culture? Are

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they invested? Do school staff model empathy, respect and generosity to the parents?

- When parents walk into the school, they should feel welcomed and respected.
 - Survey parents about their needs and concerns.
 - Parent and community resources should be known and easily accessible.
 - Consider a Parent and Community Advisory group.
5. **RETHINKING DISCIPLINE:** Has your child's school moved away from Zero Tolerance disciplining policies? Is it using restorative practices to support student development?
- Have written policies that state a rejection of Zero Tolerance.
 - Educate staff on Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice and how to do it equitably and well.
6. **MEETING THE SERVICE NEEDS OF STUDENTS AND FAMILIES:** Has your child's school implemented steps to move social workers, guidance counselors, school wellness staff, homeroom teachers, deans and mentors into more proactive roles, rather than passive roles, for teaching and working with students?
- Make sure the team of professionals responsible for student wellness are communicating and collaborating.
 - Look for community resource partnerships that can be housed at your school.
7. **ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM:** Does the school have systems and strategies in place to manage, talk and work with students who are chronically absent or late?
- The school has policies that individually address cases of absenteeism and truancy, rather than automatic suspensions for students that arrive late.

8. **UTILIZING STUDENTS AS LEADERS AND**

UPSTANDERS: Are student voices and concerns solicited and included? Is high engagement considered as much as high expectations? How well are staff supporting and offering opportunities for participation by students in creating positive school climates?

- Create a student advisory committee and take student input seriously.

Parents can exercise their influence within several levels of their school communities: at the school level, at



“ Make your presence at your child's school known and let the principal know you are paying attention. Talk to your principal about the academic and attendance benefits of a healthy school climate, as well as the emotional support it can provide the adults and students at school.”

the district and school board level, with other parents, and directly with their own kids and their friends.

A great place to start exploring where to make your voice heard is with the administrators at your child's school. Principals are the leaders of their schools, setting the tone and direction for staff and students. Though many of the policies that are implemented at the school level are mandated by the state, School

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Board and District, principals have the ability to add to policies with additional programming that can make or break the existence of a healthy school climate.

A good way to get a sense of the climate at your school is to think about the way you and your kids feel when you walk into the school. Do you feel welcomed? Is the physical environment warm and open? Schools act as the natural hub of a community. Often, schools are where students and families interact with services that keep the community functioning, things like health care, mental health care and social services. Does your school serve the needs of the community? School partnerships can bring community programs and resources into the school setting to augment school capacity and address families' needs beyond the classroom.

Make your presence at your child's school known and let the principal know you are paying attention. Talk to your principal about the academic and attendance benefits of a healthy school climate, as well as the emotional support it can provide the adults and students at school.

Beyond the principal at your child's school, you can also engage the school board, which represents the entire school district. It is important to be strategic in working with school board members on the inclusion of adolescent dating abuse prevention within the district's school climate. Some suggestions of these initial steps with school board members are to:

1. Gather some basic information regarding each school board member, to understand their previous or current profession (since they are elected public officials) that may lead them to support or oppose adolescent dating abuse prevention efforts.
2. Begin to build a relationship with board members, or those that have been identified as potential supporters, by first looking to inform and engage them.
3. Understand what is important to each board member (e.g. one member may be a strong supporter of school safety) in order to identify those most likely to serve on an adolescent dating abuse prevention task force.
4. Meet with board members individually before presenting ideas at a board meeting.

5. Keep the district superintendent in the loop.
6. Offer resources and recognition. For example, include a school board member at a local adolescent dating abuse awareness campaign event that offers a photo opportunity.


Presenting to the entire board is equally important. Remember, school board members are elected officials that play a specific role to ensure policies are upheld, set direction for the community's schools, and make decisions that support mutually agreed upon priorities and goals. School administration, parents and youth can all play a role in communicating the need for adolescent dating abuse prevention policies and programs across their schools. Having student leaders present on adolescent dating abuse, including sharing personal stories, in order to help prioritize the board's goals in ensuring safety for all students, can be very effective. You can also work with local community organizations that serve youth. These organizations can participate in presentations in order to help school board members better understand the services and resources available to the schools related to adolescent dating abuse. Strategizing on how to present the benefits from including adolescent dating abuse programs, policies and resources at school is integral to effectively communicating to your school board.

Look for opportunities to contribute your voice and skills at school: The Parent Teacher Association, the Parent Teacher Organization, different topical working groups and volunteer service are some ways you may be able to be involved at the school level. If you are not able to volunteer in person, there may be ways to still be involved in your child's school. You could offer to call other parents and organize around a specific event or activity or translate essential parent materials for the school.

The PTA/PTOs is a great place to share prevention education and raise awareness of topics that lend to the healthy functioning of your school. Your PTA/PTO could become a resource center parents proactively seek out. It is also a great way to find like-minded parents, form a network and organize them into advocacy—they are already showing their investment in making your school great.

Many schools also have designated communication

Communication Tips For Parents



“Tell your child that your door is always open. Let them know you want to talk to them about things that happen in their lives, or to their friends at school or elsewhere.”

vehicles to share information among parents. Can you utilize yours to share information on ways to improve the school climate? And do not overlook the chance to create a network of parents through their children. Your kids' friends are great connectors to their parents, and kids can be effective allies in advocating for healthy schools.

Often, school-wide events or performances are great places to connect with other parents. Sometimes they are the most accessible way for parents to be part of the school community. Could you suggest that a part of the time at the event be set aside to educate parents (and kids) about different topical items?

Parents are a great source of information for their children and for other parents. (See below for communication tips for parents.)

They are in a unique position to:

- Share their values about healthy relationships
- Answer questions early
- Provide ongoing information
- Counter myths and rumors learned from other sources
- Build upon past efforts to keep kids informed as they grow

DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE YOUR POWER AS A PARENT: Pay attention to the issues coming forward at the School Board level and make your voice heard and testify when an issue you care about comes up

Communication Tips For Parents

for consideration. Do not be afraid to be proactive as well. Call up your school board members and let them know how your school could serve your family better. Do not forget to show support for your principal with the school board when he/she is trying to move the needle towards a healthy school climate.

Think about whether you can be a resource for School District staff and the board. Do you have knowledge of research and evidence, programs or resources that would be beneficial to students in your district? If so, let them know.

LOCAL CONTROL AND ACCOUNTABILITY PLANS:

Every school district in California is required to create a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) made up of parents of students in the district (including parents of high-needs students). If the district has 15% or more English-Learner students, the district must have an English Learner Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) of which the majority of members should be parents of English Learners.

The PAC has the ability to review the LCAP presented to them by their superintendent, and the authority to raise any concerns. The LCAP process is a great opportunity to ensure available funding is utilized towards improving school climates for all students.

Adolescent dating abuse prevention can also easily be brought to the forefront as a priority for organized parent committees by:

- Including the issue in the agenda to present facts, trends, and specific school data related to adolescent dating abuse.
- Conducting a parent survey to measure their support for more programs and policies on adolescent dating abuse prevention or healthy relationships.
- Recruiting parents to participate in a committee or task force to develop a school adolescent dating abuse prevention policy.
- Funding school campaigns, youth groups, etc. that increase awareness about adolescent dating abuse prevention and resources.

Communication Tips For Parents:¹⁹

Be available for your children.

Find time for one-on-one interactions, and notice times when your child is most likely to talk, such as before and during dinner, at bedtime, or in the car.

Let them know you are listening.

When the opportunity for discussion presents itself, make sure your child knows that he or she has your undivided attention. If you can, stop what you are doing and listen anytime your child starts talking about concerns.

Ask your children what they may want or need from you in a conversation

Such as advice, simply listening, help in dealing with feelings, or help solving a problem.

Be a good listener.

Realize your children may test you by telling you a small part of what is bothering them. Listen carefully to what they say, encourage them to talk, and they may share the rest of the story. Listen to their point of view, even if it is difficult to hear, and let them complete their point before you respond.

Resist arguing about who is right.

Avoid giving critical or judgmental comments, even if you do not agree with what he or she says or feels. Instead say, "I know you may not agree with me, but this is what I think."

Most importantly, keep the conversation going.

Tell your child that your door is always open. Let them know you want to talk to them about things that happen in their lives, or to their friends at school or elsewhere. Remind them that you have their safety in mind. Assure them you will respect their privacy so long as their or their friends' safety is not at risk. Raise the topic again later to keep the conversation going.

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1107 9th Street, Suite 910, Sacramento, CA 95814 • info@cpedv.org • (916) 444-7163 • cpedv.org